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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [EUN](#) [USEU](#) [BRUSSELS](#)

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: RESHUFFLING OF PARTY GROUPS?

REF: A. A) BRUSSELS 1090

[1](#)B. B) BRUSSELS 1094

[1](#)C. C) BRUSSELS 1736

[1](#)D. D) BRUSSELS 2107

[1](#)E. E) BRUSSELS 2196

Classified By: USEU POLOFF TODD HUIZINGA, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Since the European Parliament (EP) "party groups" are coalitions of member-state parties, their membership is somewhat fluid; some realignment is likely to result from the June 10-13 European elections. Despite persistent rumors, the probable departure of some national parties from the Christian Democrats and Conservatives group (EPP-ED) is unlikely to threaten the EPP-ED's plurality. The coalition of Socialists and Social Democrats (PES) will likely hold together and remain the second largest EP group. The Liberal Democrats (ELDR) may increase their clout if they succeed in forming a new centrist group. An expected poor showing in the elections may move the Greens to try to join another party group. In these complex Europe-wide elections, only one result is certain: the EP's new balance of political forces will remain a mixed bag for the U.S. -- it will be up to us to find effective ways to engage the EP on the important issues. END SUMMARY.

SERIES OF PRE-ELECTION REPORTS

[1](#)2. (U) This is the final message of a series of reports on the European elections. Ref A provides general background on the European Parliament (EP) and the European elections; ref B is a broad analysis of expected campaign issues and election outcomes; ref C analyzes the possible impact of MEPs from the 10 new EU member states; ref D discusses the role of U.S.-EU relations in the elections campaign; and ref E describes key MEPs who have good re-election prospects.

EPP-ED: WILL DIVERSE PARTIES STAY TOGETHER?

[1](#)3. (C) David Fieldsend, an expert NGO lobbyist at the EP, succinctly summed up the ever-present possibility of party realignment: "the EP may have only 8 party groups, but those groups are made up of over 100 parties." According to Fieldsend and other interlocutors, the center-right EPP-ED could change in two major ways: it could lose centrists (see para 5), or the euroskeptics (especially the UK Conservatives) could leave and form a separate group. Which party group some of the new-member-state parties will join also remains uncertain. In the EPP-ED's case, German Christian Democrats (especially the Bavarian CSU) might oppose inclusion of the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the EPP-ED because of its opposition to the revocation of the post-war Benes decrees, under which Sudeten Germans were expelled after WWII from what is now Czech territory.

[1](#)4. (C) Despite the likelihood of some change in membership, though, it appears that the pragmatic desire to remain the EP's largest party group will carry the day. Klaus Welle, a long-time top adviser of EPP-ED Chairman Hans-Gert Poettering, told us that Poettering's "big tent" strategy would take precedence over ideological purity. So far, this has been confirmed by events. Earlier this year, amidst rumors of a possible split between the pro-EU-integration Christian Democrats and the euroskeptic UK Tories, Poettering and UK Tory leader Michael Howard negotiated a deal keeping the Tories in the EPP-ED. On March 31, EPP-ED members approved the bargain by a large majority. How tough the EPP-ED's post-election negotiating strategy will be with euroskeptic or center-left parties will thus depend on whether the EPP-ED comes out of the elections with a large plurality.

NEW FEDERALIST "CENTER" PARTY?

[1](#)5. (C) ELDR leader Graham Watson, European Commission President Romano Prodi, and French Union for French Democracy (UDF) leader Francois Bayrou have announced the possible formation, after the June elections, of a new centrist,

"EU-federalist" EP party group. The group would aim to include the ELDR, members of the French UDF, Prodi's Italian center-left Margherita Party, and several regional parties. Although some of the pronouncements of the players involved give the impression of a done deal, our interlocutors differ on how solid the agreement actually is. Welle told us, for example, that Bayrou, a "tough negotiator," was demanding that the word "liberal" not be included in the party name, something hard for ELDR members to accept. Also, the Prodi party, made up of Italian former Liberals, Socialists and Christian Democrats, may also find it difficult to unite under the "liberal" label. Summing it up, ELDR MEP Cecilia Malmstroem cautioned that "nothing is certain" until after the elections.

WHITHER THE GREENS?

16. (C) Because virtually no Greens candidates will be elected from the new member states -- several reports forecast a single Latvian aspirant will be the only one -- the Greens may end up in fifth place behind the far-left EUN/NGL (even though polls predict that the EUN/NGL will also lose seats). Malmstroem went so far as to speculate that the realist wing of the Greens might be forced to seek a coalition with the ELDR. Greens MEP Joost Lagendijk (strictly protect) also told us that the Greens, in the event of a poor showing in the elections, might make overtures to either the PES or the ELDR.

FAR RIGHT BEARS WATCHING

17. (C) Among the small party groups, the far right bears watching. During the current term far-right parties such as the French National Front, the Belgian Vlaams Blok and the Austrian Freedom Party were non-aligned. If they succeed in working together and are strengthened by allies from the new member states, they may form their own party group (which by EP rules must include MEPs from at least 5 member states) and thus become participants in the EP's committee and leadership structure.

COMMENT: EP TO REMAIN A MIXED BAG

18. (C) Assuming the British Conservatives stay in the EPP-ED and it keeps its plurality, the biggest change in the party-group balance would probably result from the formation of an ELDR/centrist group. In that case, the additional seats for the centrists/liberals and the probable losses of the Greens and the EUN/NGL would combine to enhance the ELDR successor's weight as a kingmaker between the EPP-ED and PES. If this new group does come into being, we expect the addition of the Prodi party and others to exacerbate the ELDR's tendency to vote against U.S. interests. In both legislation and "sense of Congress" resolutions, an ELDR successor would form frequent majorities with the PES and the far left in opposition to U.S. policy on issues such as Iraq, data privacy, climate change, Guantanamo, and the ICC. One additional question mark is whether new member state parties will noticeably change the dynamics within EP party groups, rendering them more diverse and perhaps more open to U.S. input (ref C). Regardless of the elections' outcome, one result is certain: the EP will remain a mixed bag from the U.S. perspective. It will be up to us to find effective ways to influence party groups and individual MEPs on each of the important issues. END COMMENT.

SCHNABEL